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BLM–ALASKA
FRONTIERS

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Happy trails — they're all on the database!

Visitors come to Alaska from the continental United States and from countries around the world to experience recreational attractions managed by the Bureau of Land Management. This growing appreciation requires BLM to protect the public lands while providing quality recreation opportunities.

The Recreation Management Information System database, known as RMIS, is the tool by which outdoor recreation planners report visitor use information. RMIS provides a method for outdoor recreation planners to document use of trails, rivers, campgrounds and other areas, as well as revenue received from recreation permits and user fees.

Using RMIS data as a tool, BLM works with other agencies and partner organizations to improve accessibility to public lands and recreation facilities for all visitors. (p.2)

Ed Bovy

Visitors hitch up their dog team as they get ready to leave the Wolf Run Cabin in the White Mountains Recreation Area, north of Fairbanks. The recreation area has a system of winter trails and shelter cabins.

Hikers visit BLM public lands — RMIS software does the tracking

John Geiger

Two of the nearly 650,000 visitors to BLM managed lands and related water-ways in Alaska enjoy a trip on the Delta National Wild and Scenic River.

Sightseeing, hunting, hiking, biking, mushing — people love visiting Bureau of Land Management public lands for the astounding variety of activities. How trails, campgrounds and rivers are used, how often, and by whom, is valuable information factored into management considerations every year. But where does the information come from?

Outdoor recreation planners in BLM field offices around the country use the Recreation Management Information System database, known as RMIS, to collect, report and analyze visitor use information. In Alaska, gathering the information can be a challenge, considering the vast acreage and remote nature of most of the public lands managed by BLM.

"We use many different methods to collect data," notes Glennallen Field Office outdoor recreation planner Marcia Butorac. "There are register sheets from trails and rivers, and vehicle and boat counters, and we get a tremendous amount of information from over flights. Our volunteer campground hosts provide very good visitor counts from the campgrounds and boat launches. I bring in information from my use of different areas, especially in the winter. Reports from the public are very valuable and always welcome. Each year we improve our techniques. Last summer, we were very fortunate to have law enforcement ranger Ted Gage temporarily assigned to our office — he spent a lot of time on several trails and brought in good counts."

RMIS software is designed to track various recreation programs such as trails, rivers, byways, special areas, sites and special recreation permits, as well as agreements and partnerships. One of the main functions is to calculate, with input from field specialists, the length of time, and where and how visitors spend time on public lands.

"BLM will always have an ongoing need to collect, track and report good social science data," says Alaska RMIS coordinator Jake Schlapfer. "RMIS is the best tool we have to accomplish this task. In this time of decreasing budgets, RMIS plays an important role in tracking the revenues generated from various use fees and special recreation permits. In fiscal year 1997, BLM Alaska collected more than $100,000 in revenue. This money will be returned to the Alaska recreation program to help offset operation expenses. This allows the BLM recreation program to be less dependent on federal appropriations and still provide quality recreation opportunities."

BLM stresses the use of education and interpretation to encourage visitors' knowledge, appreciation, responsible use and safe enjoyment of public land resources. BLM is also working with other agencies and partner organizations to improve accessibility to public lands and recreation facilities for all visitors. But visitors play a key role in assisting BLM to accomplish these goals.

"Before I came to work for BLM," admits Butorac, "I didn't take time to sign register sheets — I didn't know how my information could be useful. If there is one thing I would like to encourage visitors to do, it would be to fill in the data on the register sheets. This information helps us plan for and provide the services our customers want and need."

—KJ Mushovic

Information on recreational and leisure use of public lands is presented annually in the BLM's report: Public Lands Statistics. This report, which includes a wide array of information on BLM managed lands and resources, is available via the Internet at www.blm.gov

BLM awards MMS for NPR-A support

Ed Bovy

BLM-Alaska State Director Tom Allen (right) presents MMS' Bob Brock (left) and Ray Emerson (center) an engraved gold pan in December. BLM - Alaska awarded the Outstanding Partnership Award for MMS' efforts to help BLM meet critical deadlines in preparing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska.

Bureau of Land Management - Alaska State Director Tom Allen presented the Alaska Office of the Minerals Management Service with BLM's 1997 Outstanding Partnership Award. The award recognizes the individual or organization that made the year's most significant contribution to BLM's mission to manage the public lands.

The MMS supplied key staff and expertise to assist BLM in preparing the Integrated Activity Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the northeast corner of the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska.

"Thank goodness the Minerals Management Service was able to help. As a result, we've met the deadlines and we are still on track," says Allen.

BLM and state fill in abandoned mine openings

Andy Williams

BLM geologist Craig McCaa, left, and Sid Richards of the state abandoned mine land program inspect a former mine opening that was filled in to protect the public. The abandoned mine openings were on a trail used by people on snowmachines, four-wheelers and mountain bikes on Ester Dome near Fairbanks.

Three abandoned mine openings on a popular trail near Fairbanks have been filled in with dirt to protect the public. The project required approval by four state and federal agencies, and was completed within one month for $3,200.

Last summer, a mining company doing survey work on Ester Dome found three mine openings on abandoned federal mining claims. The holes — the largest was about 20 feet deep — were in a cleared power line right-of-way, and apparently date from gold mining activity at the Little Eva Mine in the early part of the century. Records show that no significant work has been done at the site since the 1930s.

The abandoned federal mining claims are managed by the Bureau of Land Management. They are on land selected by the state under the Alaska Statehood Act, but not yet conveyed. A survey crew brought the holes to the attention of BLM geologist Craig McCaa in the Northern Field Office, who contacted Brian McMillen of the state Department of Natural Resource's (DNR) abandoned mine land program.

"The area is used by people on snowmachines, four-wheelers and mountain bikes. The mine openings were partially collapsed and concealed by brush. They were a definite hazard to people using the area," McCaa says.

BLM and DNR staff concluded that if the holes were not filled in before snowfall, unsuspecting snowmachiners would be at risk. Obtaining necessary authorization in time to complete the work before snowfall was a challenge.

The state's abandoned mine land program includes federal funds for reclamation of abandoned coal mine sites, but spending the money on abandoned gold mine sites required a letter from Alaska Governor Tony Knowles requesting approval from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

"Everything worked quickly," McMillen says. "The governor's office responded within a day; the federal Office of Surface Mining in Washington approved the state's use of the funds two days later. We prepared bid documents, evaluated bids and selected a contractor within a week." H&.H Contractors of Fairbanks filled in the shafts and contoured the ground to prevent erosion. The area will be seeded in the spring.

The close cooperation by state and federal agencies brought praise from DNR Commissioner John Shively. "When DNR, BLM, the Governor's Office and the federal government in Washington can agree on something within a few days — and the public can benefit within weeks rather than years — you know that you have got a job well done," Shively says.

—Andy Williams

Draft EIS out for comment

The much-anticipated Draft Integrated Activity Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (IAP/EIS) for the northeast corner of the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska was mailed out in December to people requesting copies. The document also is available on the Internet at:

http://aurora.ak.blm.gov/npra/

"The IAP/EIS contains 750 pages of text, 94 maps and nine appendices," says project manager Gene Terland.

BLM also is sending copies of a special 60-page Summary to those on the NPR-A mailing list who did not wish to receive the entire document.

The Draft EIS outlines five different approaches to the future management of the northeast part of the NPR-A. Options range from continuing current management, which includes no oil and gas leasing, to designating special areas for resource protection and making the entire study area open for future leasing with protective stipulations.

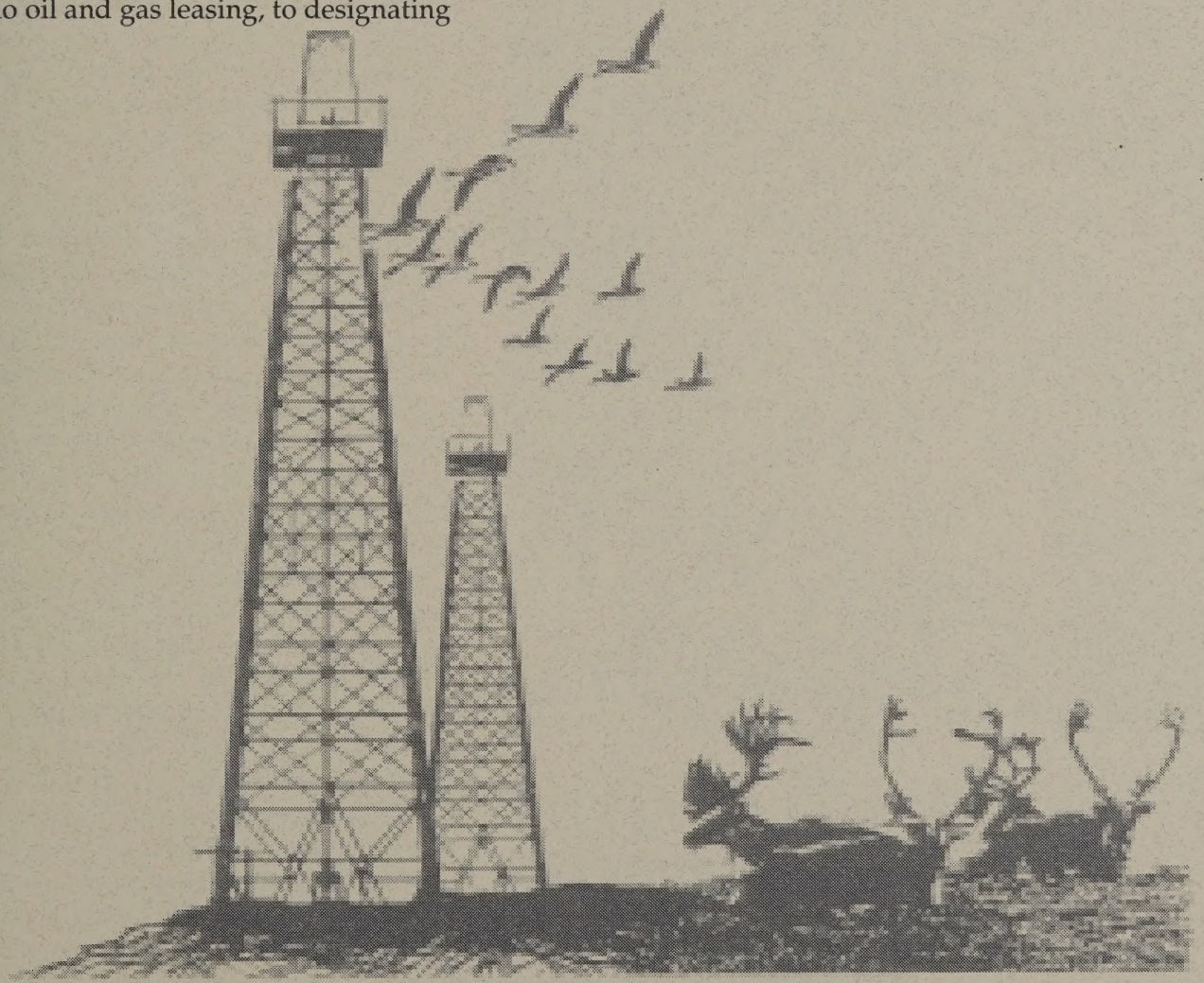
Prior to holding formal hearings to take testimony, BLM has held a series of meetings to explain the Draft EIS and provide tips on how to read and effectively comment on it .

January 1998
Formal hearings to obtain public comment and testimony.

February 10, 1998
Comment period closes.

June 1998
Final EIS published.

July 1998
Final record of decision document released.



BLM crews restore two cabins in the White Mountains

Andy Williams

The BLM crew relaxes after completing work on the Windy Gap Cabin in the White Mountains National Recreation Area. From left are Collin Cogley and Tim DuPont, outdoor recreation planners with the Northern Field Office; Lance Clouser and Mike Bradley, smokejumpers with the Alaska Fire Service (AFS); and Bill Baker, AFS carpenter.

Travelers on trails in the White Mountains National Recreation Area this winter will see continued improvements to the public recreation cabins maintained by the Bureau of Land Management.

Crews from the Northern Field Office (NFO) repaired one cabin severely damaged by ice flow and restored an old hunter's cabin. When the restored cabin is completed in the spring, it will be added to the list of nine cabins available for public use in the one-million-acre White Mountains National Recreation Area.

Hundreds of snowmachiners, dog mushers and cross-country skiers use the 200 miles of trails and other facilities maintained by the BLM in the White Mountains. The cabins are available for overnight stays by reservation through the BLM's Public Information Center in Fairbanks.

The Windy Gap Cabin, 30 miles east of the Elliott Highway from the Colorado Creek trailhead at Mile 57, was the first public recreation cabin constructed by BLM in the White Mountains. It was built in 1985.

Over a year ago a nearby creek flooded and changed its route to run close to the cabin. During the winter, the spring feeding the creek glaciated, forcing ice to flow under the cabin. It destroyed insulation in the floor, making it uninhabitable.

"In early April there was one-and-a-half feet of ice above the floor," says Collin Cogley, outdoor recreation planner with the NFO. "The ice had frozen up about flush to the bottom bunk and the bottom of the stove had ice in it."

The insulation still contained ice when the recreation crew returned in the third week of July. They removed the insulation and exposed the joists to let them dry. A five-person work crew from the NFO and the Alaska Fire Service was airlifted to the site in August. The

crew jacked up the cabin. They built cribs out of treated lumber and put them under the cabin to raise it 30 inches. "We raised the floor above the high ice mark. This allows the ice to flow under the cabin without causing damage," Cogley says. With new insulation and flooring, the cabin should provide many more years of use. The BLM staff also hopes the creek may retreat to its original course over the years.

The other cabin was built near Bear and Champion Creeks. When the owner died, the cabin reverted to BLM.

A four-person crew began work on the cabin in late July. They gutted it, cut spaces for a large window in the back and a smaller window in the front and replaced the small entrance with a normal-size door. They jacked up the cabin and placed it on a solid foundation of large beams. The crew replaced the floor, the insulation in the floor and ceiling, fitted the ceiling with tongue-and-groove boards, and installed a wood heating stove. They built a deck and topped the cabin with a metal roof.

By early March of this spring, bunks and a cooking area will be built and a new outhouse installed. Cogley says he hopes to see the cabin open in March or April to accommodate people enjoying spring snow and moderate temperatures. An announcement will be made when the cabin is ready for use. The 15-by-25-foot cabin will sleep at least six. Cogley says the cabin is east of the established system of trails but near the White Mountains Gateway Project, where new recreational facilities are being built at Nome Creek. Primary access is from the McKay Creek Trail at Mile 42 of the Steese Highway. The cabin is about seven miles north of the Ophir Creek Campground, which will be completed this summer.

Richard's Cabin, named in memory of its owner, will be the tenth public recreation cabin in the White Mountains, but the first in the upper Beaver Creek drainage. Plans call for the extension of winter trails toward the Nome Creek area and for the construction of more cabins.

—Andy Williams

Andy Williams

Photos show Richard's Cabin before renovation (above) and afterwards (below).

Andy Williams

From left are Eric Yeager, outdoor recreation planner with the Northern Field Office (NFO); Bill Baker, a carpenter with the Alaska Fire Service; and Tim DuPont and Collin Cogley, outdoor recreation planners with the NFO. Richard's Cabin will be the tenth cabin maintained by BLM in the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

Members of New York-based Czar Film Company's production crew, searching for a remote Denali Highway location in which to shoot a commercial, found themselves in the middle of the Nelchina caribou herd's winter migration.

"When we went out to scout locations the day before shooting, there must have been 5,000-10,000 head of caribou trotting along, with steam rolling out of their noses — it was one of the most amazing things," recalls Bob Crockett, of *Alaska Locations, Inc.*

Crockett coordinated the logistics of the shoot, which was authorized by a land use permit issued by Glennallen Field Office realty specialist David Mushovic. The Denali Highway was selected for the commercial in order to capitalize on the windswept, barren landscape, not a multitude of wildlife. "They asked how the caribou could be moved," according to Crockett. "By the next day, though, they had mostly moved through, so we were able to get the shot we wanted."

The commercial, promoting the cellular telephone capabilities of the communications company *Ameritech*, is not targeted for use in Alaskan markets.

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If you are involved in or have an interest in the management of rivers, waterways, or watersheds, mark the River Management Society's (RMS) fourth biennial symposium on river management and planning on your calendar. The RMS symposium, "Rivers: The Future Frontier," will take place at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage April 29 to May 3, 1998.

Alaska's Kenai River issues and management success stories will be spotlighted. Also included are field trips to BLM's Campbell Creek Science Center, and workshops in Wilderness First Aid, Grant Writing, and Leave No Trace ethics.

The RMS is a nonprofit organization devoted to the protection and management of river resources. Many BLM - Alaska employees are RMS members who enjoy access to the clearing house of river information RMS provides.

For more information, contact Bunny Sterin at (907) 271-5069; Fax: (907) 271-5479; E-mail: bsterin@ak.blm.gov; or visit the web site at www.servcom.com/rms.

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